

ELSIE LOCKE: 1912-2001.

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Towards the end of her life, Elsie Locke asked me – ‘insisted ‘would be a better word. – to reread her prize winning essay ‘Looking for Answers’, published in Landfall of 1958. She was, I think, looking back over her long and productive life, and was reflecting on her period in the Communist Party from 1932 to 1956 which the essay covered. This essay is a response to Elsie’s request.

I take the approach of my book, *The Nationbuilders*, which is written around a series of biographical essays to explore the big theme of the nationbuilding program that occurred between 1932 and 1984. Right at the end of my writing, I added an extra chapter to explore the different experience of women in the nationbuilding state. This involved choosing a living woman, although all the male nationbuilders were dead. There were two prime candidates: Elsie and Sonja Davies. I chose Sonja, because that enabled me to extend the trade union story which I had begun in the chapter on Fintan Patrick Walsh. Elsie died in April 2001, shortly after the book had gone to the publisher, and it was not practical to add an additional chapter. This essay might be the missing chapter.

There is no biography of Elsie Locke. Some periods of her life are well recorded, others exist in primary documents including her own papers, and some gaps can be filled from memory, the oral record and conjecture. This was true for a number of other subjects of the book. Aside from autobiographical writing this essay is currently the longest written life of Elsie. This is true for eight of the subjects in *The Nationbuilders*. The sooner that number is reduced to zero, the better. Elsie’s full biography could be a brilliant work of scholarship so I will not be able to do her full justice. And while *The Nationbuilders* only indirectly explores some very contemporary issues, I directly mention the ‘war against terrorism’, as Elsie herself would want.

Elsie Farrelly, the youngest of four children, grew up at Waiuku, near what is now the site of the Glenbrook steel mill. Her Student at the Gates describes the life of a simple but loving family, not particularly well off. Her father was a builder. One cannot help drawing a parallel with the father of the five-years-older Bill Sutch. He was also a builder, and he too left the money management to his wife. Both mothers were committed to women’s causes. Elsie’s was especially committed to peace, bemoaning the loss of young men in the First World War. As in Sutch’s case, her parents did not go past primary education, but they gave their children the best education available.

That was not easy. Waiuku was a long way out of Auckland – Elsie mentions two hours by train – and in those days the local school was limited. One educational influence was the local minister, although Elsie left church at the age of fourteen. Most other nationbuilders of her generation were also greatly influenced by a religious upbringing. The Nationbuilders remarks that New Zealand socialism owes much more to Methodism than to Marxism.

Elsie was the only child of the family able to go to Auckland University College, and the first from her district. She went with a secret ambition to become a writer. Her tertiary education story is both the joy of youth getting the best education available, and the eking out a frugal existence, missing out on academic opportunities as a result. In 1932, in her second year, public events were to change the course of her life. Let Elsie tell the story:

“On a grey day in April I stood on the pavement at John Court’s corner, Auckland, watching for the first time a demonstration of unemployed men. ... There were, I think, ten thousand demonstrators, with no common characteristic except their shabbiness. Many bore the marks of their trade or background: the farmer, the navvy, the counterhand, the carpenter, the tailor, the office executive, and those too young to have any occupation at all. Eight abreast, they came and they came and they came; scarcely any banners, no music, no shouting, just thousands of feet beating ragged time, thousands of faces diffident or philosophical or determined.”

She recognised one of the marchers as coming from Waiuku.

“A moment before they all had been strangers. It seemed to me now that I might have known any of them. My father, my brother, my friends, could have been among the ten thousand. I do not think it was the poverty of these men that shattered me It was the injustice, the idiotic injustice, and the assault on the dignity of the human being that ‘the unemployment problem’ meant when translated into human terms and multiplied ten thousandfold. Everyone knew that the shops were stacked with goods the shopkeepers couldn’t sell, that the farmers, with butterfat at fourpence a pound and wool at sixpence a pound, were walking off their farms ... When the last of the ten thousand had passed me, I was left on the pavement to answer the question these men had silently flung at me: whose side are you on? Whoever you are, and wherever you are going, I am going too, I had answered.”(1)

Soon after came the Queen Street Riot, in which a protest march turned violent after the police brutally struck down its Communist leader, Jim Edwards. It was a turning point in New Zealand history. A number of seminal literary works came out of it: John Mulgan’s *Man Alone*, John A Lee’s *Children of the Poor*, Bruce Mason’s *End of the Golden Weather* the most prominent. The government reacted by passing the Public Safety Conservation Act, which was used so repressively against the watersiders in 1951. The Queen Street Riot marked the nadir of the Great Depression – the reality that a green and pleasant land could be so different from the dreams. As we have forgotten those events, and parallel ones which took place in other New Zealand cities, we have forgotten the terrible lesson of the breakdown in the world economic system.

Elsie never did. She was not at the riot, although became marginally involved when Jim Edwards hid in the house of the family with whom she boarded. But the economic and political tumult led her, step by step, to join the Communist Party in 1933. Very often we see institutions from the end of their history rather than the beginning. I suspect Elsie wanted us to see how the Party's beginnings were very different from the view we have of it today.

Marx was one of the great intellectuals of the nineteenth century but, as so often happens, his ideas have been simplified and distorted by subsequent generations. From the perspective of the 1930s, Marxism provided a powerful account of the troubles that faced the world. Virtually all the standard economics we use today to interpret the Great Depression – of Keynes, Schumpeter, Friedman – has been developed since the 1930s, an admission that the economics of the day was not very helpful. (An exception was that at the time it was known that New Zealand had to realign its price levels. But that does not explain the world depression.) Marxism, on the other hand, already had a theory built round the falling rate of surplus value, which predicted increasingly intense economic slumps. That the depression of the 1930s was more severe than its predecessors and seemed to confirm the theory.

Moreover, Marxism was not just an economic theory. Its combining economics, history, philosophy, politics, and sociology is one of its attractions. The combination results in a prediction about the future course of the world, in the context of a deeply moral vision. (For all its strengths, today's central economic paradigm cannot. Insofar as there is a moral vision in economics it comes from outside the strict paradigm.)

Third, there was the example of the Soviet Union, which was thought to be a land without unemployment while the rest of the world suffered. Of course there were some dreadful things happening in the Soviet Union at the time, but the information available to the world was restricted, and the odd criticisms were explained by propaganda, the transition from capitalism, or minor anomalies. A couple of letters to newspapers shortly after her death – perhaps the critics were unwilling to tackle her in life – argued that Elsie and others should have known about the true state of the Soviet Union in the 1930s.⁽²⁾ That is an ahistorical judgement – I wonder how informed the critics were of what was going on in Vietnam in the 1960s.

A fourth compelling issue was the spectre of fascism. Many believed in the 1930s, and some believe to this day supported by some evidence in the historical record, that the western liberal nations wanted to cooperate with the fascist ones against communism, because their capitalists saw the communist attack on private property as the greater threat.

So it was not unreasonable for someone in the 1930s, concerned about the state of the world, to join the Communist Party, as Elsie did, even though they were strongly committed to democratic values, as Elsie was then and remained throughout her life. Perhaps she should have picked up a signal when she was criticised at an early stage, for her 'pacifist illusions, ... feminist tendencies and other divergences from the straight and narrow path.' But as she said

“What really decided me was the overwhelming sense of social crisis. I couldn't stand on the sidelines examining every facet while fascism rose in Germany, the world

prepared for war and unemployed families went into their fourth year of hunger and humiliation. If I was going to look for a perfect way to peace and freedom and a decent life for all, I was not going to find it. The battle was on: we had to be in it.”(3)

Elsie was not alone. One of the best accounts we have of the early development of the New Zealand Communist Party is *Rebel in the Wrong Cause* by Sid Scott, who was a founder of the Party in 1921, who received training in Moscow in the late 1930s, who was the Party Secretary for a period in the late 1940s and who left the Party after 1956. Shortly after he published the book in 1960, he joined the local Methodist Church, a shift which was no surprise to his readers. Scott can be described as a ‘liberal communist’, as can Elsie and a good number of others who joined in the hope that Marxism offered the brave new world, and who left disillusioned after 1956. She defined ‘socialism’ as

“Concerned with the aim of men to become whole men, living in a society where individual and collective needs are in harmony; where the producer receives his due share of the product, and plays a full part in the administration of community life. This is inconceivable without intellectual and personal liberty.” (4)

Marx would be comfortable with that. The lyrical writing of the younger Marx (although most of those texts were not available in the 1930s) contrasts with the authoritarianism of some of his best-known followers.

Even so, there are serious methodological problems with Communism. Elsie’s Landfall article states: ‘The first fatal flaw is the concept of the monolithic party – party of single will – with the organizational structure of “democratic centralism” to uphold it. ... This system gives a unanimity of action but no guarantee that the action will not be misconceived and misdirected – and no means of correcting it’. This criticism while true, might be attributed to the problems of Marxism-Leninism, rather than pure Marxism. (Indeed, it is equally a criticism of the rognomes who blitzkrieged through a wrong economic policy in the 1980s and 1990s.) She goes on that the ‘... second fatal flaw is in the confusion of this limited and relative knowledge with what are assumed to be absolute and universal truths.’(5) Intriguingly both her points could have come from Karl Popper. They are unlikely to have met. More likely, Elsie was affected by the milieu he left in Christchurch.

At the end of 1933, aged 21, she went to Wellington where, because the leaders of two successive national committees of the Communist Party had been jailed, she found herself Wellington District organiser/secretary, and organised Working Women’s Committees. She started, and wrote for, *Working Woman*, which evolved into *Woman To-Day*, which described itself as ‘non-sectarian, non-political and non-commercial’, concerned with ‘Peace, Freedom and Progress and all that pertains to women’s advancement in any sphere of thought, and that affects the welfare of children.’ In 1934 she had organised, with Freda Cook and Connie Birchfield, a Women’s Convention, a precursor of the 1976 one in which Sonja Davies was influential. And, perhaps with less support from a Party unenthusiastic about Elsie’s ‘feminist’ tendencies, she was a key founder in 1936, with Lois Suckling and Jean Dawson, of the Sex Hygiene and Birth Regulation Society. A misprint in an advertisement, which mentioned ‘girth regulation’, led to a name change to the ‘New Zealand Family Planning Association’.

Probably her peace activities were more acceptable to the Party. In 1938, she, Connie Birchfield and Wally Jamieson had walked down Cuba Street carrying signs with slogans such as 'English Materials are Smarter and Better', and 'Japanese Goods Means Japanese Bombs: Don't Let Your Money Buy Bombs.' They were charged with being in a 'procession without a permit'. Their successful defence rested on the fact that there was a good distance between each of the protestors – twenty yards according to some witnesses – Elsie using the Oxford English Dictionary to argue this was no 'procession'.

An active productive life and she had yet to turn 30. She married another communist, Friedrich Engels (Freddie) Freeman, and had a son Don, who later became a philosopher in a British university. The marriage did not last, and shortly after the divorce in 1941, she married Jack Locke. They moved to Christchurch where Jack became a Belfast freezing worker at the direction of the Party.

Jack had been born in England in 1908 and had come here at the age of 18, joining the Communist Party in 1935. He deserves a biography of his own, even though his life was almost wasted in the freezing industry. He had exceptional talents in relating to children, and in a fairer world he would have been a teacher. He did his stint for the Party, as a worker, local secretary and a candidate. The legacy he left to his workmates was his role in the 'sick benefit society' with its payments and other support for their families facing illness and death, to which he added his generous personal attention. He collected left wing publications, saving them for posterity, and helped run the Cooperative Bookshop. The good Lord gave him a second chance, for he lived twenty years after he retired, doing good works for progressive causes. He was a key figure in promoting community and the environment in the Lockes' neighbourhood. Despite the wrong occupation, when he died at 88, his life was a triumph.

Shortly after they settled there, Keith arrived. He is now a Green list MP. Then Maire, a social worker who did a stint as a local body councillor. Then Elsie spent two years in hospital with TB. (Sonja Davies also suffered from the scourge.) It was a time for reflection about the nature of society and the role progressive politics played in it. There is an interesting parallel with Sid Scott, who being blind, would also lie in bed, reflecting. Both began to doubt the direction the Communist Party was taking.

Because Elsie was out of the way – in hospital, and far from the New Zealand Party centred in Wellington or Auckland – it is Scott's Rebel in the Wrong Cause which is the primary source. He describes the difficulty the New Zealand Communist Party had in relating to the Labour Party which won the general elections from 1935 to 1946. The essential problem of the relationship between the Marxist and non-Marxist accounts of social development, and – not quite the same thing – the revolutionary and evolutionary traditions of the left, was compounded by the need, as far as the Communist Party was concerned, to support the Soviet Union, which was seen as the bastion of their socialism. Since the Soviet Union was allied with Hitler at one stage, and fought him later, this led to very supple accounts of the international situation by Communists. Elsie recalled in 1958 that in the 1940s

“I hated the military spirit [Communists] cultivated. What to us was a ‘people’s war’, a kind of civil war against fascism which stretched across all national frontiers was presented in Soviet propaganda as a patriotic war for the Russian motherland. What unsavoury developments were emerging beneath the surface of the heroic and self-sacrificing battle of millions of people to smash the fascist stranglehold? We were not channelling the river of history. We were being swept along in it, up to our necks in the water, silt and foam.”(6)

Shortly after Germans and the Japanese were defeated, the Cold War began, dividing the world – as far as the protagonists were concerned – into two. The effect was to leave the liberal Communists stranded, as the Communist Party became increasingly authoritarian and repressive towards dissent within its ranks. But so did the other side, as they organized a vision of the world into black and white, capitalism and communism, good and evil.

Were she here today, Elsie would not only condemn such crude simplifications, but draw our attention to how it has happened yet again, since September 11th, 2001. She would have had no truck with terrorism, but even so would have asked to what extent the other side had genuine grievances which were ignored by the American alliance, and would have vigorously questioned whether the use of terrorist methods by the alliance was justified in any war against terrorism. For my part, and I suspect Elsie would agree, I am extremely uncomfortable that there has been such an abandonment of the rule of law, and fear that whatever happens, by causing such an abandonment the terrorists have won.

If Elsie was not as aware of the stress within the Party, like Scott she was questioning the situation, and conflicting with the party-line. Once she expressed a reluctance to reach a conclusion on the expulsion of the Yugoslav Communists from the Cominform, until she heard Tito’s side of the story. She was told brusquely ‘If they say he’s wrong, then he’s wrong, and you have got to accept it.’ There are so many issues and problems, we all take much on the authority of others because we have not time to check it all ourselves. However, one of the natural activities of an intellectual – and Elsie was certainly an intellectual – is to consider independently, to go deeper, to challenge. Most people find this radicalism – going to the root – disconcerting. She recalled:

“These were times that called to faith, not questioning. I committed the supreme crime: I did question. Furthermore, though I did not realise it, I was attacking at the very point that had become the core of Party life: the absoluteness of centralised authority in ideology, policy and organization. In consequence, the officials could not even examine fairly the evidence I produced, for the raising of the challenge, quite apart from the nature of it, was impermissible.

“Now I was regarded as a menace within the camp: a petit-bourgeois influence which had to be dealt with, by limiting in every possible way my communication with other members; by appealing to my loyalty; by diverting my energies into innocuous channels; by directly or indirectly linking my views with those of the ‘class enemy’.

...

“Having failed, I felt trapped. Believing that to condone or conceal evil is to share in the commission of evil, I was being made accomplice to the hypocrisies, cruelties and injustices which were rife under the shadow of the ageing Stalin. Had this been the whole picture, no choice would be necessary. But our movement’s original purposes still asserted themselves, too. At the ground level, where the ends of trade unions workplace or locality were concerned, the old methods – ‘listening to the workers’ and interpreting and guiding their aspirations – were still in evidence. I liked and admired my comrades, with their stalwart toughness and ready spirit of selfless service. Their advocacy of world peace was passionate and sincere. ...

“‘When I get disgusted with my own side,’ said a friend to me one day, ‘I take a good look at the other side. I soon come scurrying home.’ And it was true that we could look at the state of the world from any one’s angle and ask, ‘Who is blameless?’ and receive no answer.

“No I was committed: I was not prepared to loosen my political loyalties, which a hundred personal loyalties were intricately woven. Here, where I already belonged, was the place for my own small effort towards changing the world. I felt very much alone: for Party rules forbade, under the heading of creating factions, and expression of doubts or criticisms outside formal meetings and procedures. I could not turn back. I could only go on searching.”(7)

Those sentiments were expressed a decade after they had arisen. However earlier she published a sequence of poems ‘From Hospital’ in Landfall which from one perspective expresses the joy of someone recovering from a severe illness, but from another can be interpreted as reflecting sentiments about her situation in the Party. The last poem reads:

III. RELEASE

I who have prisoned lain and still,
And watched the seasons rise and pass
Through iron frame and rigid glass,
Nor thrust my hand beyond the sill:

Now that there is rain upon my face,
Now there is wind about my hair;
The dusk shall be my sister, where
The trees reach up to her embrace.

Here secretly the river sways
Into an arc of crimson light,
And golden arrows tip her flight
And set the glistening lawns ablaze:

And casting off her peace again
The cosmic ducks flash in and out,
The children laugh, and run and shout!
And I am walking in the rain.

Winter 1948.

But where could she walk? There were now four children with the arrival of Alison who is a school counsellor. But this mother had to find a career. Her ambition remained to be a writer. It was not going to be through the Communist Party, which had, in effect, funded much of her writing of the 1930s and 1940s. While *Landfall* and the *Listener* remained venues, with some remuneration, writing for them was not a career. Other possibilities were ruled out by her past Communist Party connections, exacerbated by the Cold War, and the aftermath of the 1951 Waterfront Dispute. She turned to School Publications, perhaps as vital a contributor to New Zealand's intellectual development as *Landfall* and *Listener*. They cultivated her, and with the encouragement of an editor, Alistair Campbell, she wrote her first children's novel, *The Runaway Settlers*.

Writing for children, if it is done well, is as demanding a task – if not more so – as writing for adults. Children are tough critics. The story has to be gripping all the way – with humour, even irony – or they quickly lose interest. Some write for children only while their own are young, for then there are eager critics waiting in the bedroom. Some writers make a lifelong career of it, trialing on their children, grandchildren, neighbourhood children, schoolchildren, young friends and anyone else available. Elsie continued to write for them until shortly before her death.

The Runaway Settlers is the paradigm for many of her subsequent works. It is a historical novel, based on a broad set of facts, although inevitably there had to be imaginative additions and also minor changes to accommodate the story. Historians say that Elsie's historical writing, including her fiction for children, is so thoroughly researched they can rely on it. The subjects are ordinary folk, not the great and good. Her stories are deeply moral, although not overtly so, and the people – especially the women – typically appear as sturdy independent characters. Mrs Small runs away from a drunken husband, and survives by applying the skill of cattle management she learned in Australia, to the Port Hills of Christchurch. The happy ending reflects the Canterbury view of the gold rushes. The eldest son goes to West Coast but does not find gold. The mother herds her cattle over the Southern Alps, and sells them for the gold. Settlement wins over the quarry. There is a strong women's perspective, not only in the model of Mrs Small, but the story hinges on the legal provision that until 1882 a married woman's property was owned by her husband, so the family has to run away and hide, because if the husband found them he could take over all the assets his wife had built up and, if he wished, drink the proceeds.

Being a Canterbury based story, there is no Maori dimension. Although she grew up in the Ngati Te Ata rohe, there was little interaction between the Pakeha and Maori in her childhood. But when writing *The End of the Harbour*, she showed such sensitivity to the race relations – a feature of many of her later books – she was given *kuia* status in Ngati Te Ata.

She wrote children's, and more occasionally adult, histories too. Not all her books are historical. *The Boy with the Snowgrass Hair*, based on the tramping diaries of Ken Dawson, is the ideal present for an adolescent who has just become an enthusiastic tramper. Not only is a good yarn, but it also has a lot of practical advice. Elsie was a keen tramper as long as her legs let her. One example pops up in the biography of the

Australian Communist and painter Noel Counihan, who spent a few years in Wellington before he was shipped back by our immigration authorities. A walk she arranged over some Khandallah hills in 1939 led to Counihan meeting his future wife, Patricia Edwards.

The Runaway Settlers, indeed all of Elsie's books, is an exercise – a conscious exercise – in nationbuilding. It gives children – the next generation of New Zealand adults – images of their country to which they can relate, which become a part of their culture. Elsie was not alone in this. Writing for children is one of the glories of New Zealand's nationbuilding, for the books are 'ours' and yet they meet the international tariff of overseas sales and prizes.

In October 1956 the Soviet Union responded to the Hungarian attempt to liberalise their state, albeit in a Communist framework, by invading the country and putting in a malleable government. For my generation of New Zealanders, not steeped in the events of the previous quarter of a century, the suppression of a small state's independence and autonomy by an outside superpower was totally unacceptable. For the liberal Communists who had been through those times, and who had been alternately dismayed by what was going on in the Communist Party and world, and hopeful (as Marxists should be) that it would be reversed, the invasion was a brutal termination of their greatest hopes. Elsie was asked to sell on the street copies of the Party paper, The People's Voice, which praised the invasion. She refused. She left. Others left with her: Sid Scott, Connie Birchfield and others of the Party's best and brightest.

It involved a rupture in hundreds of friendships, as some crossed the line and others stayed. Many of those ruptures were later to be regretted, and Elsie responded warmly when those who stayed with the Party approached her to renew their friendships. We have already seen how much she admired them, even if she thought them politically wrong.

Surely the most difficult case was her relationship with Jack, who remained a staunch member of the Communist Party and its successors right to the end, although in his last years he expressed doubts about Stalin's role. When in the Landfall article Elsie expresses her admiration of the positive features of New Zealand Communists, one might think she had Jack most in mind. It seems possible she wrote the Landfall article in part to communicate with Jack. If so, there is a sense that the article is a love letter. I cannot tell the story of the difficulties of their relationship following Elsie's breach with the Communist Party. In later years one was simply struck by what a loving and devoted couple they were. At Jack's funeral Elsie said they agreed to disagree because of 'good old fashioned love.'

Even so, the matter had to be handled with tact, and Elsie did not have the option that, say, Scott had, of joining a church or the Labour Party, even had it occurred to her. Instead those passions which had led Elsie into the Communist Party were turned to the peace movement, the environmental movement, the women's movement, human rights, civil liberties, and anti-racism among the most prominent. It would take a book to record it all, but her peace activities deserve further mention.

Elsie's Landfall article finishes with 'Bold thinking and vigorous discussion are ahead if we are to snap out of the complacency and outdated attitudes, and fit ourselves for life in the atomic age'.⁽⁸⁾ I do not know which was her favourite book, but perhaps she considered her most important was *Peace People: A History of Peace Activities in New Zealand*, published when she was 80. In recording the history of the peace movement in New Zealand, surely one of the most extraordinary triumphs in the history of the nation, she was also developing New Zealand.

Once on an Easter March in the 1960s, I heard her discussing with Quaker Mary Woodward, then national secretary of CND, how such activities were not merely dealing with immediate issues. It was also socialising the next generation of New Zealanders in the traditions from which they came and the values to which they were committed. Elsie was enormously proud of her role in this process, which extended beyond her children and grandchildren, to a host of others of their generations.

The nationbuilding that Elsie was involved in was not of the nation-state, but the nation-society, that broad community of people, with commonalities in their values, their histories, their images and symbols and their friendships and networks. She was not jingoistic, just immensely proud of being a New Zealander – a pride which acknowledged there had been failures as well as successes. If she had ever been a school teacher, her highest commendation would have been 'done well, can do better.' Hers was not the language of overstated rhetoric, but of practical achievement.

We all have regrets over some details of our lives. I do not think that Elsie regretted joining the Communist Party when it was possible for a liberal to see it as a progressive force. Perhaps she regretted that she stayed in it so long – a quarter of her life. Certainly she regretted Jack stayed longer, but that he did so was an expression of his character which remained loyal to her through the political tumult they went through together. While the New Zealand Communist Party may have ended up in a cul-de-sac, each of them had many nationbuilding achievements.

She is commemorated in Elsie Locke Park, beside Christchurch's Avon River, part of the swimming pool complex to which Elsie cycled whenever she could. Not far downstream is the Avon Loop which forms three sides of the neighbourhood where Jack and Elsie lived for over half a century. Their cottage looks across a quiet road to a broad green riverbank. How many times did the couple take visiting children across there with bread to feed the ducks? Elsie recalled that the stream was once terribly polluted, but today eels come up past the cottage to her park, and beyond. Elsie saw herself as a steward of the environment (and the historical record), for future generations. When they rebuilt the kitchen, she insisted on a normal height bench, with a pedestal for this wee vigorous robust woman to stand on. She said that later the kitchen would be used by someone of standard height. Much later, it proved to be, for she lived to 88.

The Avon Loop is a quiet gentle civilised part of New Zealand – recovering from past environmental destruction, protecting itself from the pressures of commercialisation, a privileged oasis in a turbulent world. If the nation is lucky – and visionary – one day the Locke cottage may be a writer's residence. But the oasis has not happened by accident. When developers threatened the Avon Loop, the neighbourhood – the Lockes in the vanguard – successfully organised a resistance against the predations.

Later Elsie threatened to have her name taken away from her memorial park, when it was proposed to rename the pool after a commercial sponsor. Hers was a life of integrity which thought globally, and acted locally, and by those local actions made the neighbourhood, the city, the nation and – ultimately – the world a better place, and will inspire later generations to do the same. She stands next to us, as we stand up for a better environment, human rights, justice and peace, as today we protest against that ideological crudities of the war on terrorism, as we build a nation in this our green and pleasant land.

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The essay has also used various obituaries, copies of which will be placed at the Alexander Turnbull Library. It has also used memories of the author, the Locke family, and Elsie's friends.

Endnotes

1. Locke (1958), pp.335-6; (1981), p.97.
2. Christchurch Press 11 April, 2001; Dominion 28 April, 2001.
3. Locke (1981), pp.175-6.
4. Locke (1958), p.355. Original's italics
5. Locke (1958), p.352-3.
6. Locke (1958), p.341.
7. Locke (1958), pp.344-5. Original's italics
8. Locke (1958), p.355.